GOVDOC
M3/B16
PHC
01/5
gov 01-764

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS DEPARTMENT
RECEIVED
DEC 18 2001

Mayor Thomas M. Menino

Public Health Fact Sheet

Communicable Disease Control
1010 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA 02118

Bioterrorism

What is Bioterrorism?
Bioterrorism is a form of terrorism in which infectious biological agents, such as bacteria, viruses, or toxins are used (or are threatened to be used) against another person to create fear and disrupt normal daily activities. Use or threatened use of such agents is a Federal crime and is thoroughly investigated by the Boston Police Department, FBI, and other agencies.

Has bioterrorism occurred in Massachusetts?
There have been threats of bioterrorism in the past, and all of them have turned out to be hoaxes designed merely to create fear and disrupt normal daily activities.

What is the Boston Public Health Commission doing to prepare for a possible bioterrorist event?
The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) has been preparing for potential bioterrorism for several years. BPHC has been working with health care providers and others in the city to develop an early warning system for possible bioterrorist attacks. This system will allow city officials time to implement steps to prevent further illness.

How will I know if I have been exposed to an infectious biological agent?
Most bioterrorism threats to date have been hoaxes, so often people only *think* they have been exposed to a biological agent. If you suspect you have been exposed to a biological agent, notify emergency personnel immediately by calling 911. Boston Police, Fire, Emergency Medical Services, and Public Health Commission will work together to collect and identify the suspect material.

If I actually were exposed to an infectious biological agent, what symptoms should I look for?
Different viruses, bacteria, and toxins may be used as bioterrorism agents, and each may cause different symptoms. Often however, they resemble either the flu or food poisoning. People who are exposed may experience fever, chills, headache, body aches, and muscle weakness. Others may experience coughing, diarrhea, abdominal cramping, nausea and vomiting. It is important to remember that these symptoms are common of many illnesses and are not usually the result of bioterrorist events.

How long would it take for symptoms to appear?
The length of time it takes for symptoms to appear can vary greatly depending on the type of agent used. Symptoms can appear between several hours and several weeks after exposure.

What can be done if I am exposed to a biological agent?
For many of these agents, treatment is available. However, it is very important for treatment to begin early. Therefore, if you suspect you may have been exposed to one of these agents, see a health care provider as soon as possible.

For more information contact:
Boston Public Health Commission
Communicable Disease Control
617-534-5611